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RESTRUCTURING CITY GOVERNMENT, THREE PROPOSALS FOR HUMAN SERVICES.

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PROPOSED IS THE CREATION OF THREE NEW, INTERDEPENDENT MECHANISMS OF CITY GOVERNMENT--ELECTED DISTRICT COUNCILS, A DIVISION OF SOCIAL PLANNING, AND A BUREAU OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY. BECAUSE THE FUNCTION OF EACH UNIT IS CLOSELY INTERRELATED THEY SHOULD OPERATE IN CLOSE COLLABORATION. THIS REORGANIZED ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE WOULD BE ABLE TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH THE ISSUES OF DECENTRALIZATION OF SERVICES, MEANINGFUL CITIZEN PARTICIPATION, SOCIAL PLANNING FOR HUMAN SERVICES, ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PUBLIC SERVICES, AND MECHANISMS FOR THE REDRESS OF CITIZEN GRIEVANCES. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED IN A SYMPOSIUM ON "HUMAN COMPONENTS IN URBAN PLANNING," NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL WELFARE ANNUAL FORUM (DALLAS, MAY 24, 1967). (NH)

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Restructuring City Government  
Three Proposals for Human Services

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Paper presented in a symposium on  
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## Restructuring City Government: Three Proposals for Human Services

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In the next twenty or thirty minutes, I would like to focus on the question of how a city is organized to improve and facilitate the provision of human services. By human services, I refer to the functions that are formally organized to meet general needs as well as specific problems. The range is from police services, schools, and housing rehabilitation to income maintenance, protective services for neglected children and mental hospitalization. My thinking is based on the specific case of Springfield, Massachusetts, but the proposals I will present are applicable, I believe, to most middle-sized cities, and perhaps, to large cities as well. Issues that have to be dealt with include: decentralization, participation, effective planning, accountability, and citizen defense.

Let us begin with decentralization of services, a process that has been recommended in recent years by any number of studies, position papers and projects, usually in the form of some kind of neighborhood service center, which seems to be the new panacea in social welfare. When I was in Washington recently to see people in three different agencies, it was very difficult to work out my schedule, because people were involved in meetings and conferences. It turned out that in each instance, the conference or meeting was on the subject of neighborhood centers. Three different meetings in three different agencies on the same day and all on the same subject. This is an index of the acceptance of the need for decentralization. There is less agreement on methods, sponsorship or focus.

The medical people see neighborhood health stations, that draw together and coordinate what they call "the ancillary services." Public assistance people have a vision of neighborhood social welfare centers; psychiatrists of neighborhood mental health centers and so forth. Each one views the center as an outpost of a centralized agency or--at the very perimeter of radical thinking--an uneasy alliance of outposts of several centralized agencies, operating under one roof and depending prayerfully on the emergence of huge quantities of goodwill to ensure coordination.

So far, the thinking about decentralization is almost purely geographical, but one of the main purposes of decentralization is not only to make services more accessible, but also to make them more integrated and the only way to integrate services is to recognize that the needs for services of different kinds are integrated--integrated within one individual or family. If six different workers from six different agencies are working with one family, it will make very little difference that they all have offices in one building around the corner, rather than in different buildings downtown. The task is to reduce the number of workers--as close to one as possible--and to arrange that the worker has primary attachment to the neighborhood service center and that the center in turn has primary loyalty and responsiveness to the neighborhood it serves.

On the question of citizen participation, there is far less agreement and no generally accepted panacea has emerged. As Mr. Toole pointed out in his paper, the increasing popularity--and, we must also recognize, effectiveness--of a form of city government with a strong mayor or manager, and at-large elections of legislative bodies, has occurred at a certain cost, a certain diminishing of pluralistic methods of decision-making, one might even say a loss of democracy. The mayor or

the councilman or the member of the board of education who is elected by the city as a whole represents everyone in general, it is true. It is also true that he doesn't represent anyone in particular. It is often a case of brute rule by the majority with little concern for the minority. Large segments of the citizenry can then find no real answer to the question, "Who represents me? Me personally, my block, my neighborhood?" An even harder question is, "How do I get my two cents into the pot? How do I make my voice heard?"

To counteract this situation, a whole series of devices have been revived, recommended, developed and tried out. They include the old-fashioned neighborhood organization, appointed citizens advisory committees, citizen advice bureaus, elected or appointed area poverty boards, the ombudsman, neighborhood city halls, citizens relations bureaus in the mayor's office, mass organizations on the Saul Alinsky model, and the Community Foundation. Most of these devices fail of their purposes on one of two grounds: either they allow for no real participation in decision-making or they are at best ambiguously representative. The average block or neighborhood organization, we all recognize, has limited appeal and limited membership. It might be called the Hill Neighborhood Organization, or the West Side Citizens Committee, or the Jefferson Improvement Association, but it is usually made up of only a tiny fraction of the citizens; it doesn't organize the neighborhood; and there is often even very serious question as to what precisely it intends to improve. The mayor or any other politician can usually decide for himself, on the basis of his own needs whether he will greet its delegates as the voice of the people or ignore them as a handful of malcontents. Finally--and perhaps most important--such citizen groups have nothing real to do. So they focus their attention on vague functions that exist in a virtual vacuum--organizing, improving, or, often just being a committee. Since they have no work to do, they are often perceived, rather accurately, and particularly in low income communities, as, at best, trivial, at worst, another tool to exercise political control by the downtown representatives of the majority.

Similar criticisms can be made of most of the devices proposed. The ombudsman may indeed work on behalf of the people; he certainly doesn't represent them and he has little impact on the decision-making process. Advisory boards of all sorts--from urban renewal and poverty to community mental health centers--are rarely representative in any sense whatever, and are usually called on to react to, rather than participate in, decisions. Even when such boards are elected--as in the experiments with elected poverty boards--they are not representative. The people don't participate in the elections because they don't want to waste their time playing games with essentially empty structures that have no real work to do, no decisions to make.

The two exceptions to this rule that I can think of are the Alinsky-type organizations and the Community Foundation idea developed by Milton Kotler and now in operation in Columbus, Ohio. In both instances, there is usually very wide participation and there is work to do: either defensive work of opposing exploitation or, in the case of the Community Foundation, the direct operation of service enterprises. Not advising about service enterprises, it should be noted, but directly operating them. A striking point to be noted is that both of these models call for mass participation, completely inclusive, together with election of representatives.

I would propose, therefore, that the solution to the problem of participation requires an organization with a mass base, with elected representation, and with specific tasks to perform and primary decisions to make. The twin problem of decentralization and participation can, I believe, be met by a device that constitutes one of three proposals that I will lay before you in a few minutes.

The third problem area is effective planning for human services. In the past, planning for human services has been largely in the private realm, the characteristic agency for such planning being the voluntary health and welfare council. A major drawback has been the separation of public and private service agencies, a separation that has been accompanied by significant differences in status, resources, and



responsibilities. In more recent years we have been accepting more and more the idea of basic public responsibility for almost all human services. The step we have not yet taken is to move planning into the public sector, except in a limited way for some public services, usually related in some way to land use. It should be noted that the basic difficulty facing the voluntary planning agency--the public-private split--could be dealt with more effectively by a public agency. This is true because of the ambiguous legal status of the so called private agency. Although it has rarely been pressed--or touched upon--it is important to remember that private social agencies are chartered to meet a public purpose, that they are often subject to regulation or licensure by a public agency, that they are more and more frequently funded by public money, either through purchase of service or grants, and, finally, that their access to private funds is dependent upon the publicly granted privilege of tax exemption. For all these reasons they are, at least, potentially susceptible to the public will. My second proposal, then will concern itself with the desirability of social planning as a public function.

The fourth issue is accountability, about which so many words have been spoken and so many deeds left undone. Just as it is true that everyone who talks about heaven ain't going there, it is equally true that everyone talking about accountability--ain't accounting. In fact, hardly anyone is. The reason is very simple. Accountability is dealt with as an abstract virtue in much the same way that we deal with, for example, chastity. An abstract virtue may be defined as one that everyone believes in, but few people practice. Evidence that the idea of accountability belongs in this category of abstract virtues is to be found in the fact that we have no mechanisms for insuring accountability with respect to services. Financial accountability is another matter, directly comparable to the concrete virtue of honesty. Whatever our real expectations may be about individual chastity, we are damned serious about whether or not people steal money. In the public field, the office of city comptroller or budget director is very important; he oversees the financial affairs of public human service agency very scrupulously, though he may not give a hoot about the quality of the actual services. In like manner, we arrange to audit the books of private agencies to make sure there is no hanky-panky with the money. The people, the clients, we apparently do not count as so important. At least we do not seem to hold agencies to strict standards of service or really to any standards. I would propose that we move accountability for services into the realm of concrete virtues and do something about it.

The final issue, citizen defense, is in a sense the obverse of accountability, seen from the client's point of view. If citizens are to believe in and trust a structure of human services, there has to be some way in which their grievances can be, not only heard, but redressed. They have to feel that there is some likelihood of being defended against unfair or abusive treatment; that errors and misjudgements are correctible and further than they can influence the process.

We are all aware of the phenomenon of city life that might be called the case of the "Giving Enemy." I use the term Giving Enemy to describe many citizens' perception of the policeman, the school principal, the welfare worker and other representatives of service agencies. This agent of public service, in the opinion of many recipients, does indeed give us what we have to have--protection, education, enough money to ward off starvation--but he seems to be against us. He patrols our street, but he seems rude to us, and is often called brutal. He sees to it that our children are taught, but he doesn't seem to like them or understand them and he is always scolding us about our poor home life and our lack of interest. She arranges that a check comes to our door twice a month, but she is nosy and unsympathetic and critical and demeaning. Someone once defined ambivalence as the feeling you experience

when your mother-in-law drives your new uninsured Cadillac off the side of a cliff. An additional definition might be the feeling of an AFDC mother toward her welfare worker; or those of the resident of a Negro ghetto toward the cop in the prowler car. These are the Giving Enemies and they will be so perceived regardless of their personal characteristics because it is very rare for them to be perceived as individual persons. Opportunities for meaningful interactions and human relationships are not provided. And in particular, there is no provision for the redress of real grievances and what is equally important, the differentiation of real from unjust grievances. Under such circumstances, it is hard to see how the low income citizen and his Giving Enemy can ever engage in productive interaction. The citizen will be distrustful and resentful, the worker, the policeman, the principal will be frustrated, angry, and oversensitive. What is needed is a complaint mechanism for routine negotiation and resolution of conflicts, not in an atmosphere of crisis and protest, but in some such manner as that developed in labor relations with built-in grievance machinery.

The issues of accountability and citizen defense form the content of my third proposal for structural change.

Let me now present to you the three proposals for dealing with the five issues of participation, decentralization, more effective planning, accountability and citizen defense. The first proposal would call for a new level of governmental machinery, an elected district council in every district of a city. The council would have direct operating responsibility for all public human services and indirect responsibility for all private human services. Its members would be elected by the residents of the district. Those eligible to vote should include everyone who lives or works in the district over a given age--I would recommend the age of 17 or 18. The council should be able to hire its own administrative staff and the staffs of the public service programs. Its funds should be protected from capricious appropriation by some system of modified per capita expenditures or some formula based on objective measures of need. The primary task of the district council would be to operate a decentralized and integrated system of human services including schools, police, child welfare, family counseling, urban renewal, public housing, neighborhood health care, etc. This program of decentralized services would, of course, have to be backed up and supported by an additional citywide centralized system consisting of both highly specialized direct services and supportive indirect services. The principle to be followed is simply stated: decentralize those aspects of service that are more generalized and need to be integrated at the point of delivery; aspects of service that are more specialized, expensive or rarely used would be centralized, as would be those that require scarce, highly trained staff or that benefit from the efficiency and economy of centralized operation. A few examples can be given: prenatal care would be decentralized in neighborhood centers, cobalt therapy centralized in the general hospital; aftercare follow-up of discharged mental patients would be decentralized, long-term intensive child psychotherapy would be centralized; protective services decentralized; residential treatment centralized. The rest of the model can be readily filled in.

I would predict that such a system of elected district councils would stimulate very broad participation because there would be something to participate in, decisions to be made of importance to everyone. And, in addition, such a method of supervising and operating human services would insure greater integration and responsiveness to needs of clients and consumers because the latter would have a simple and ready mechanism for influencing the services.



The second proposal is for the incorporation into city government of the function of social planning for human services. My own predilection would be for the direct merger of social and physical planning into one agency, but I recognize that it is feasible to have separate planning agencies or to graft social planning into some other division of city government. The Division of Social Planning should use every legal tool to incorporate private agencies into a system of mutual influence and joint planning with the public agencies. It should also provide for decentralization of certain planning functions--particularly those related to coordination and integration--in close collaboration with the proposed elected district councils.

My third proposal is for the establishment within the city government of a Bureau of Social Accountability, whose general function would be to assess the effectiveness, humaneness, and service performance of agencies. It would have the responsibility of constantly raising--and trying to answer--such questions as the following: is the agency providing service to everyone who is appropriately referred to it? More important, did the service deal effectively with the problem? Did the relocation agency, for example, provide a standard home for every family displaced by the renewal project? Is the school teaching all the children to read effectively? Is the network of daycare agencies meeting the effective need or just some specialized demand? The Bureau of Social Accountability, in my view, should be a division of the proposed integrated planning agency, but I recognize the validity of other possible locations. The Bureau of Social Accountability should have a specific system for ensuring case accountability for at least a sample of cases, and it should include within its orbit a set of citizens advice and complaint centers. In its downward relationships, it also should relate closely and directly to the elected district councils, particularly around the functions of advice and redress of grievances. It is possible that the advice and complaint centers should be operated autonomously by the district council with constant feedback to the Bureau of Social Accountability.

It is also important that the bureau have a strong relationship upward, probably to a state level agency such as the office of the Governor, the Attorney General, a combined health and welfare agency, or a new state department of accountability. The state level department could provide general supervision and consultation and perhaps even some of the funding on a matching basis. We have models for this kind of state-local partnership in such mechanisms as community mental health boards.

This upward relationship would act as a counterpoise to some of the inevitable pressures that would arise from the service agencies upon another branch of what would be, after all, a unified city administration.

To summarize, I am proposing the creation of three new and interdependent mechanisms of city government--elected district councils, a Division of Social Planning, and a Bureau of Social Accountability. The functions of the new mechanisms are closely interrelated and they would have to be established in such a way as to insure close collaboration in actual operation. But I strongly believe that this trio of administrative devices would deal rather effectively with the five issues that I mentioned at the beginning of this discussion: decentralization, participation, planning, accountability, and citizen defense. Arguments against these proposals are very easy to forecast. It will be said that they would be expensive and inefficient, for example. I would only ask you to think about these objections in the context of present systems, with their excess of centralization and bureaucracy, second and third level administrators, and seemingly endless channels of up-and-down communication and decision-making. A more emotional objection would be that these proposals are radical and have a left-wing aroma and are, therefore, ipso facto, undesirable. As a basically conservative person, I would deny this very strongly and very simply. They are about as radical as the old New England town meeting and about as left-wing as the ancient question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"